Watermill site, probable wrack road and ford at Ballyruther Farm, near Ballygally, Co. Antrim.

Stephen Cameron (County Antrim Archaeological Society) and Philip Macdonald (Macdonald Archaeological Consultancy).

The hitherto unrecorded sites of a watermill, a cutting associated with a probable wrack road and a ford, have been discovered during fieldwork by one of the authors (SC) on Ballyruther Farm, near Ballygally, Co. Antrim. This report briefly describes the sites and is based upon a visit to the site undertaken by the authors in January 2009. All three sites are located within the northern half of a field used for pasture on Ballyruther Farm (Figures One and Two). The field is roughly rectangular in shape and located on a steep slope overlooking the Coast Road (Plate One). Locally known as the 'Cove Field', the field is currently used for pasture. It is bisected by the eastnortheast-westsouthwest aligned cutting associated with the probable wrack road. The area to the north of the probable wrack road, which contains the watermill site, shows no evidence for cultivation. The remainder of the field (to the south of the probable wrack road) contains a series of relict spade cultivation ridges, set approximately 2.0 metres apart from each other and aligned down slope in an eastnortheast-westsouthwest direction. The southeastern corner of the field has been subject to several episodes of slope failure which manifests itself in a series of erosional scars and slumps. The line of a possible former field boundary, which coincides with a crest in the slope of the field, is represented by three thorn trees and a large recumbent stone that are all aligned on the same northnorthwest-southsoutheast axis. This possible former field boundary is not featured on either the 1857 revised edition of the Ordnance Survey 6" series (Sheet 30), or any later cartographic sources. The 1833 Ordnance Survey 6" series for Co. Antrim did not include field boundaries.

Plate One: The field in which the watermill, cutting associated with the wrack road and ford associated with the wrack road are located, looking northeast.

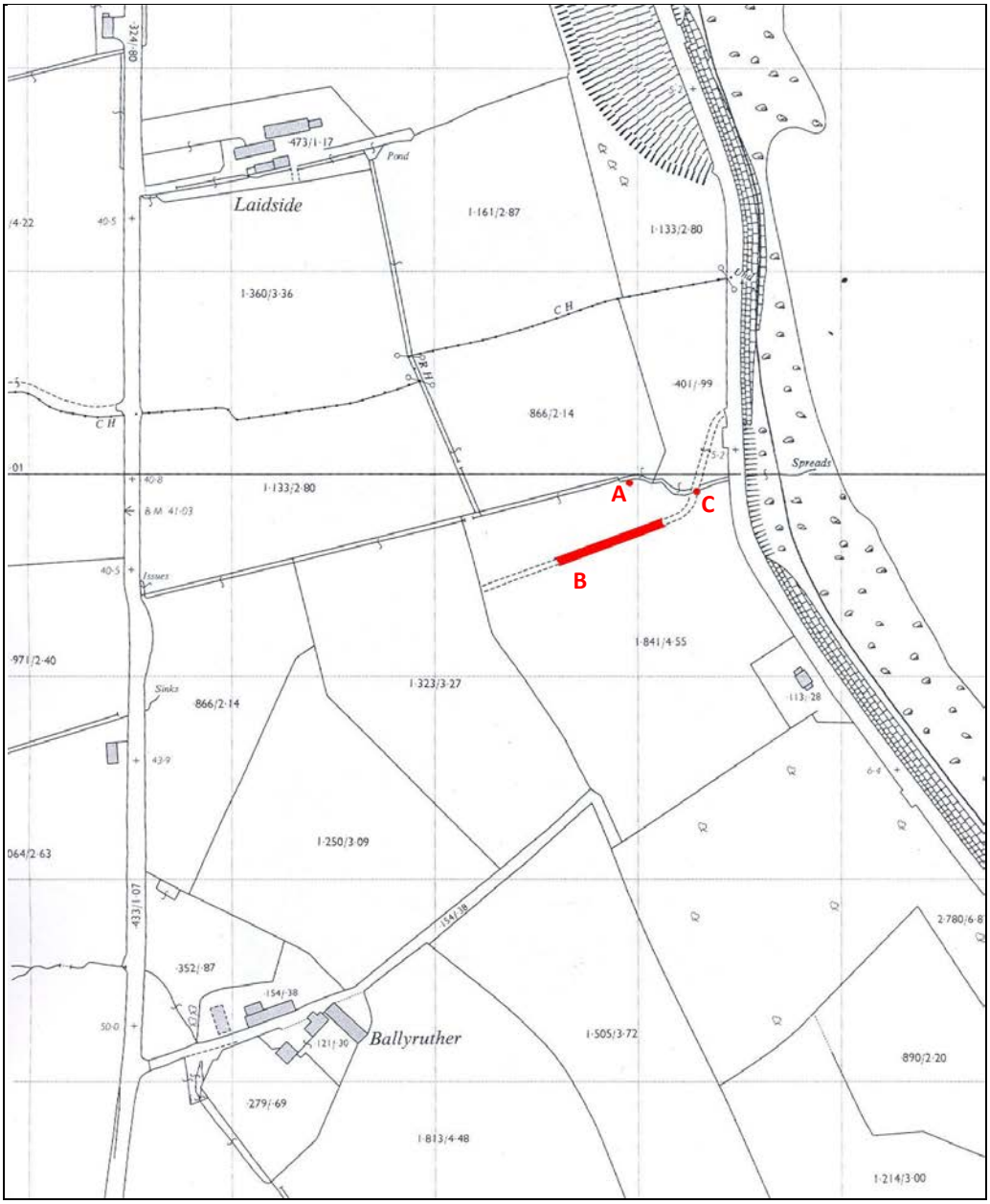

Figure One: Map showing the position of the watermill (A), cutting associated with the wrack road (B) and ford associated with the wrack road (C) (after the Ordnance Survey 1967 revision of the 1:2500 survey).

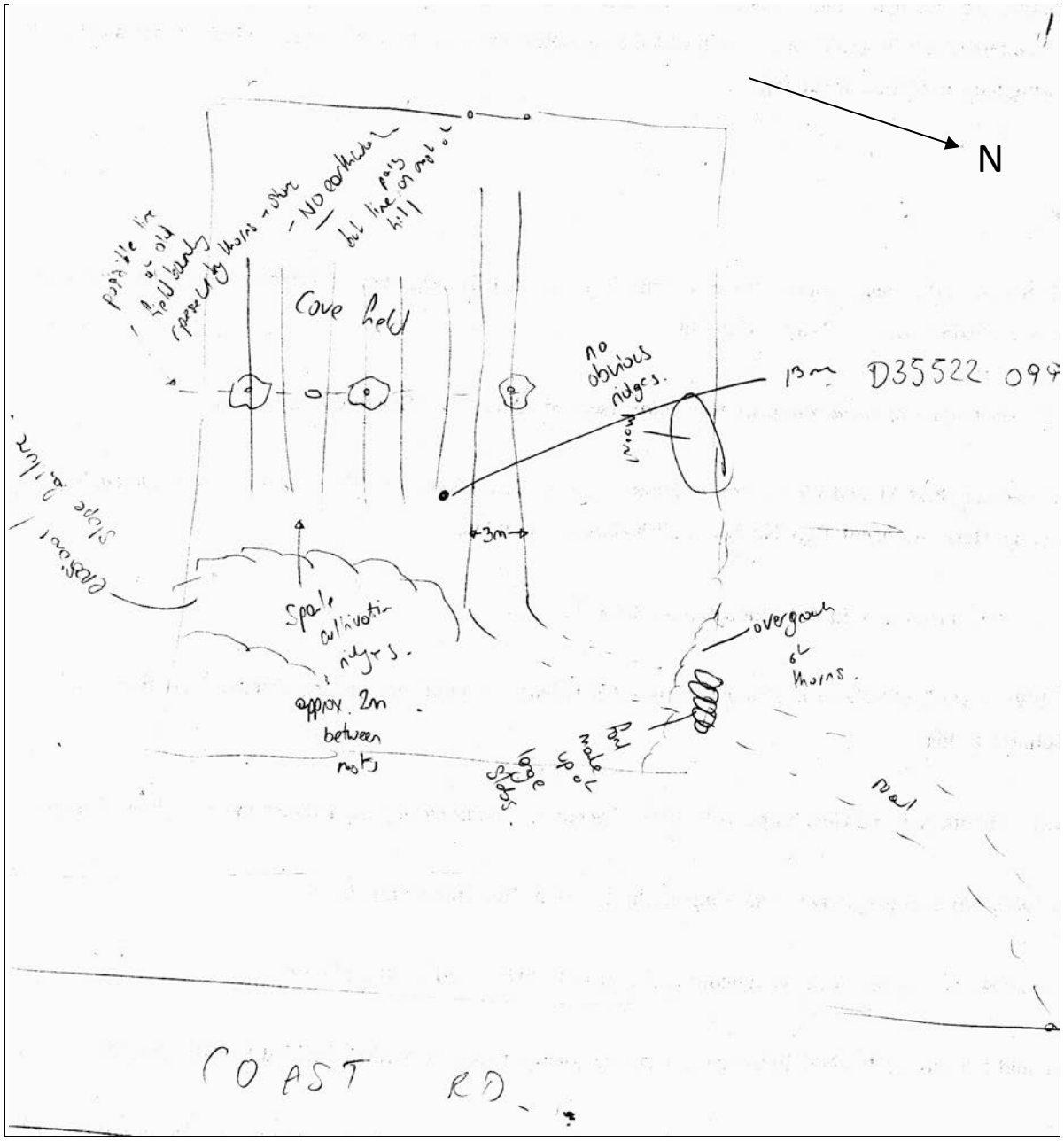

Figure Two: Annotated sketch plan of the showing the position of the watermill site, adjacent cutting associated with the probable wrack road and the ford. Produced in the field by Philip Macdonald (13/1/09).

Site A: The watermill *(Irish Grid Reference D35490999)*

The watermill is located on the edge of the field, immediately adjacent to a stream that flows westsouthwest to eastnortheast along the ditch which defines the field's northern boundary. The stream is fast-flowing being supplied by two separate streams whose confluence is located in the northwestern corner of the field (see Figure One). Neither of these 'feeder' streams follows a natural course, instead they have been diverted and incorporated into the defining ditches of the local field system. Presumably, this act of diversion coincided with the laying out of the current field system and suggests that the watermill does not predate the field system.

At present, the site of the watermill consists of a denuded mound, located immediately adjacent to the stream, and a dried-up channel which diverts from the stream immediately to the west of the mound and follows a curving line

around the south of the mound for a distance of about 13.0 metres. Some evidence for a stone-built structure in the stream bed immediately adjacent to the mound (Plate Five), and a stone-built retaining wall on the northern edge of the mound itself are observable. Apart from these, and a small cache of broken roof slates that is visible immediately adjacent to the western end of the dried-up channel, no structural remains survive suggesting that the watermill building was comprehensively dismantled rather than allowed to fall into ruin. The absence of any watermill building on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 6" map indicates that this probable act of demolition had occurred by 1833.

Plate Two: The mound upon which the watermill building was built (background) and the leat channel (foreground), looking north. One of the authors (SC) provides a scale.

The mound is made up of redeposited clay. It is approximately 10.0 metres long, and has a level summit which is approximately 2.0 to 3.0 metres wide. The mound's western end is level with the ground surface of the field, but the steepness of the field's slope makes its eastern end approximately 1.5 metres higher than the adjacent part of the field. The mound is overgrown with small trees and bushes and the area around it has been poached by stock gaining access to the stream. No grass grows over the mound and it is susceptible to erosion. Much of the mound's northern side appears to have been eroded by the stream when it has been in flood. It is suggested that the watermill building would have been built upon the top of the mound.

The dried-up channel is about 0.5metres wide with steep sides and a relatively flat base (maximum depth approximately 0.3 metres). It is visible for a distance of about 15 metres, but appears to run out to the east of the mound - in an area where the poaching by animals has been particularly damaging. It is probable that the dried-up channel would have formed the leat and tail race of the watermill located upon the top of the mound.

Plate Three: The mound upon which the watermill building was built (background) and the westernmost part of the leat channel (foreground), looking northeast.

Plate Four: The leat channel from the mound, looking southeast.

Plate Five: The denuded remains of a stone structure within the stream adjacent to the mound, looking north.

It is difficult to reconstruct the form of the mill from the surviving remains. It is reasonable to suggest that the mill's wheel was located adjacent to the mound in the dried-up channel, which would have formed the mill's leat and tail race. Given the longitudinal alignment of the mound, the wheel was presumably mounted onto the side of the building, rather than a gable end. The apparent remains of a denuded stone structure within the stream at a point opposite the mound poses a problem of interpretation. If this was the remains of a wheel pit then either the mill had two wheels, or the stream and leat have been misidentified. Alternatively, it is possible that the apparent stone structure represents elements of the mill building that have collapsed into the stream.

A further problem of interpretation is posed by the absence of evidence for a mill pond in the immediate vicinity of the watermill. Although one of the 'feeder' streams flows through a small pond (not visited) at Laidside Farm approximately 190 metres to the northwest of the mill site, as Laidside Farm is not represented on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6" map, it is unlikely that its pond was associated with the watermill. Given the amount of water draining through the stream it would probably not have been necessary to construct a mill pond in order to guarantee a constant flow of water.

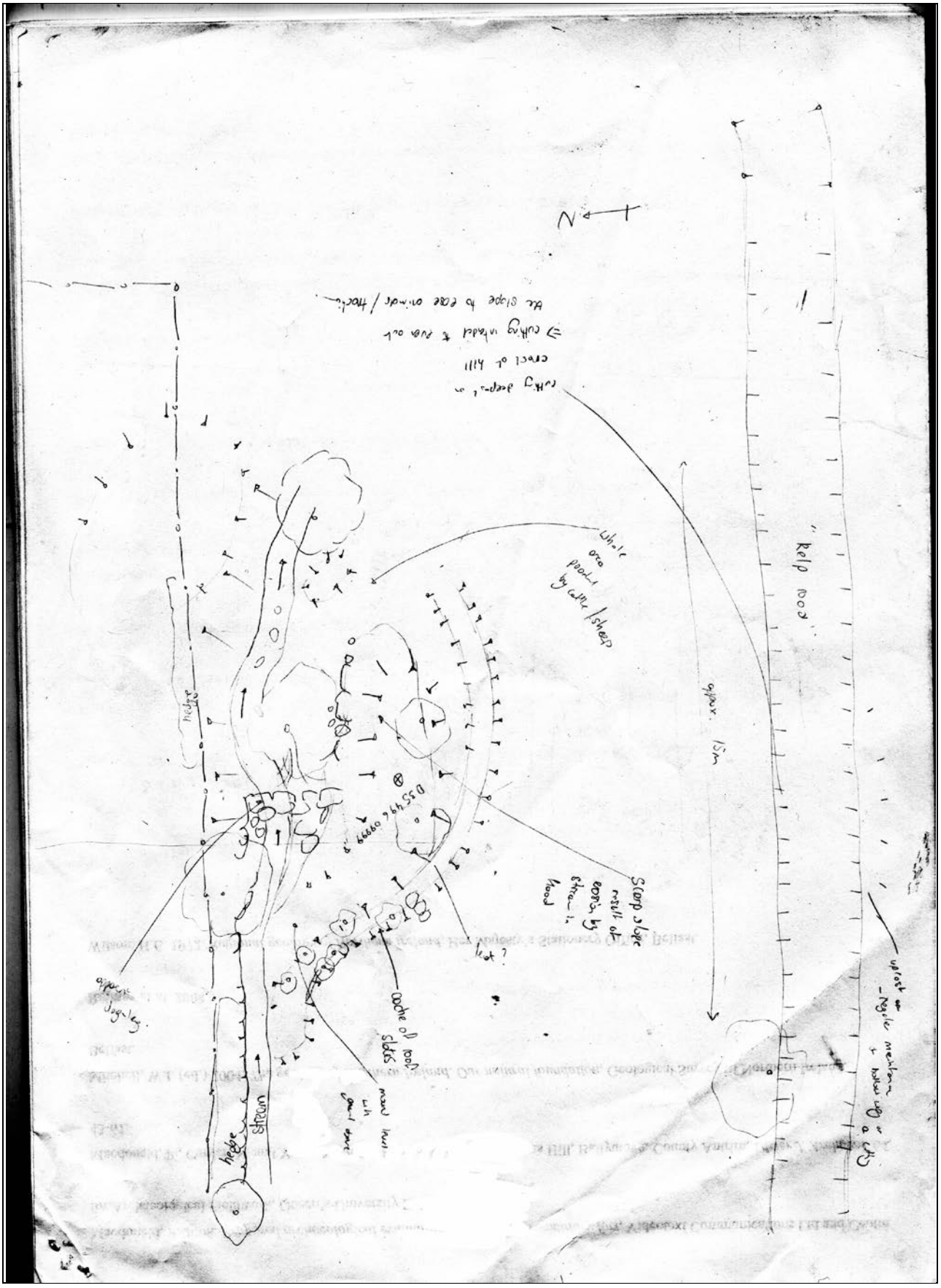

Figure Two: Annotated sketch plan of the watermill site and adjacent cutting associated with the probable wrack road. Produced in the field by Philip Macdonald (13/1/09).

On archaeological and cartographic evidence alone, the precise date of the watermill is uncertain. Given that the stream which supplies it is integrated into the current field system, then the construction of the mill cannot pre-date the laying out of the current field system. The date of the field system itself is unknown, although it is reasonable to assume that it does not pre-date the late sixteenth century. As the cartographic evidence indicates that the mill had been demolished by 1833 (see above), then the mill probably dates to some point between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth century. It is tempting to suggest that the watermill is one of those recorded as being in 'Ballyrather' in a 1635 *Inquisition Post-Mortem* as being formerly owned by a David Buthill de Glandrine and who had been succeeded by a Randulph Buthill (Inq. Ulst. Antrim Car.I (40)). Randulph Buthill is presumably the Randle Brittle whose house and parcel of 'Ballruder' / 'Ballrudery' are respectively depicted on the extant copies of the maps of the Parish of Cairncastle and Barony of Glenarne that were prepared as part of the Down Survey *c.*1656-68 (NISMR No. ANT 035:087).

Site B: Cutting associated with the probable wrack road (between Irish Grid Reference D35510997 and D35460995 Part of a probable wrack road passes through the field. Today, the line of this road can be traced from a point on the Coast Road (Irish Grid Reference D35541003), across the ford noted below (Irish Grid Reference D35520999), to a gate through the western field wall of the field containing the watermill site (Irish Grid Reference D35420994). The path of the road is clearly demarcated in the field by an approximately 3.0 metre wide cutting which is visible for a distance of about 60.0 metres (Plates Six and Seven). That the cutting is deepest where it passes through the crest of the slope suggests that it was deliberately cut in order to reduce the maximum gradient of the wrack road. Such an arrangement would ease the work of traction animals bringing loads up from the coast. The presence of a slight up-cast bank on the southern side of the deepest section of the cutting is consistent with this interpretation. Given the steepness of the route, it is considered unlikely that periodic episodes of maintenance, which might alternatively have formed this feature, would be necessary if the cutting was a gradually-formed hollow way.

Plate Six: Cutting associated with the probable wrack road, looking down slope (eastnortheastwards) towards the crest of the slope. Note the slight up-cast bank on the southern side of the cutting.

Plate Seven: The cutting associated with the wrack road, looking up slope (westsouthwestwards).

Site C: The ford *(Irish Grid Reference D35520999)*

Where the probable wrack road crosses the stream that defines the field's northern boundary, a ford of large stone slabs had been built. Although the area around the ford is now overgrown it was possible to take some photographs of the feature (Plates Eight and Nine). The ford consisted of at least six or seven large flat slabs neatly laid as lintels over a channel with an estimated depth of at least 0.15 metres. During the course of the site visit it was not possible to ascertain during the site visit how the lintel slabs were supported, or whether the base of the channel also consisted of laid slabs.

Dating the ford is difficult. It is first marked on the 1906 edition of the Ordnance Survey's 6" map, but undoubtedly, significantly pre-dates the early twentieth century. Discussions of the ford's date are inextricably linked to considerations of how and when the current field system was laid out. The path of the stream, and by extension the line of the field boundary, becomes irregular towards the lower, eastern end of the field where the ford is located (Figure One). As the stream's natural course has been diverted elsewhere to, in part, define the field boundary, it could be argued that it is unlikely that the ford predates the laying out of the current field system. However, the irregularity of the stream's course at this point raises the possibility that, if only in this part of the field, the line of the boundary deviated from its straight alignment to incorporate a pre-existing natural stream. If the ford pre-dated the laying out of the current field system then it may have been perceived as a feature worth incorporating into the field system when it was laid out. Consequently, no great confidence can be placed upon the date of laying out the field system as a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the ford. As previously noted, the date of the field system itself is unknown, although it is reasonable to assume that it does not pre-date the late sixteenth century.

Plate Eight: The ford, looking westsouthwest.

Plate Nine: Composite photograph of the ford, looking northwest.

Conclusions

The three sites described above form an important element of the post-medieval landscape of Antrim and are deserving of a more accurate survey than that performed by the authors in 2009 – perhaps, in due course, they could be tackled by the Ulster Archaeological Society's Survey Group. With or without further survey, it is desirable that the sites are incorporated into the Sites and Monuments Record and a copy of this report has been submitted to the Historic Environment Division of the Department of the Communities to facilitate this. The discoveries themselves represent an excellent example of the potential for discovering hitherto unrecorded archaeological sites within the Ulster landscape. It is the authors' hope that the account of the watermill, probable wrack road and ford at Ballyruther, as well as being of intrinsic interest to the wider archaeological community, will inspire members of the Society, once the current restrictions are lifted, to put on their boots and explore the countryside with a view to discovering sites themselves.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to Miss Jenny Crawford (Ballyruther Farm) for kindly providing access to the site. The assistance of Maura Pringle (formerly Queen's University Belfast) and Colm Donnelly (Queen's University Belfast) in the preparation of this account is also gratefully acknowledged.